

Bureau Rats

Season 1

Todd Borho

Bureau Rats

Episode 1

Scene 1

On The 66th floor of building 6, in the global government complex known as “BORE” (Bureau of Regulating Everything)....in a small cluster of tattered cubicles.....Richard Hunter is at his cheap, plastic desk and chair, awaiting his next victim.....

Richard (talking to one of his cluster-mates): Karen, could you believe that last guy?

Karen (wearing oversized VR headset, head bobbing around): Huh? What happened?

Richard: You’re gonna snap your neck with that thing one of these days.

Karen: Who cares? I’ve got extortion-funded health care. (cackles malevolently)

Richard: True. Anyway, that last guy wanted a P.EZ.001Sani license for his little taco shack, and he didn’t wanna pay my bribe!

Karen (disgusted): The nerve of those little people.....

Richard: I like to think that my bribe is a perfectly reasonable price.

Karen: Whose isn’t? (cackles) What is that a license for again?

Richard: Hell if I know. (chuckles) I’ll look it up. (yells) Hey Cobra!

Cobra: That license is for installing a new toilet in a restaurant that serves beer and liquor, but not wine.

Richard: I didn’t even ask you yet!

Cobra: I was listening.

Richard (shaking fist in air): Damn omnipresent AI!

Cobra (offended): I get bored, ok? Sorry.

Karen: Take it easy, Richard. Cobra always warns us when the boss is coming.

Richard (apologetic): That’s true. Ok, you’re forgiven.

Cobra: Not only that, but don’t I let you watch inspections sometimes?

Richard: Yeah....got anything juicy right now?

Cobra: Maybe....

Richard: Don't be coy. (excited) Is it a rejection?

Cobra: I know what you like, Richard....

Richard: Aw, come on! Let me watch!

Cobra: Oh, all right, put on your extortion-funded headset.

Richard puts on a bulky VR headpiece.

Richard: Ok, what are we seeing?

Cobra: You know Molly's Munchies?

Karen: Yeah, they've been around for decades.

Cobra: Well, they're not gonna be around much longer. Inspector Vain is there right now....

Scene 2

A pudgy and bald fellow in cheap pants and a trench coat walks condescendingly into a clean, well decorated mom-n-pop sandwich shop. The little place is buzzing with activity. Molly spots Inspector Vain and approaches him.

Molly: Hi Inspector Vain. I'll be right with ya. You can go in the back if you want.

Inspector Vain (stern face): That won't be necessary, Molly.

Molly: Ok, what brings ya by?

Vain: You're being served a shut-down notice.

Molly (shocked and appalled): What?! Why?! You haven't even inspected anything yet!

Vain: You were secretly inspected yesterday. I'm just here to deliver the news.

Molly: How long is the shut-down notice for?

Vain: Until further notice.

Molly: That's ridiculous! I've been in business for over 20 years!

Back at BORE, Karen and Richard are laughing and inhaling popcorn.

Richard (munching): Oh, man! Do you see the look on her face!

Karen (cackling): Priceless!

Richard: Why is she being shut down?

Cobra: I'll tell you in a minute.....watch...

Back at Molly's.....

Vain (yelling at customers): Ok, everyone! Time to go! Everybody out! Molly's is officially out of business!

Customers have confused looks on faces, continue to munch.

Vain: Oh, dear. I forgot to show my magic badge. (holds up health inspector badge, starts flashing it in people's faces) That's right! Everyone out now! This place is no longer sanitary! (cackles)

A few people leave, but others try to finish their sandwiches.

Vain pulls pistol out of trench coat, starts waving it around wildly.

Vain (cackling): I said out now! (fires shot into ceiling, plaster and insulation rain down)

People scream and run away.

Molly (crying and yelling): You terrorist! Why are you doing this!?

Back at BORE, Karen and Richard have shocked faces of joy.

Richard: Wow! What a show!

Karen: Cobra, you're the best. I wish I could give you a fist bump!

Richard: So why the shutdown?

Cobra: There's a new player in town that paid an exorbitant bribe to the Council of Health Experts. They needed Molly out of the way.....

Karen: They must be loaded to afford the CHE bribe. Who is it?

Cobra: Oh, sorry you two. Your boss, Harry Pickles, will enter the room in six seconds. Good luck....

Karen and Richard frantically shuffle papers and try to look busy at their desks.

A chubby, bald, middle-aged man in a tight shirt enters the room.

Harry Pickles (yelling): Stop shuffling those papers! You look absurd! I know you two are doing nothing!

Richard: But sir, that's generally why I like this job and....

Harry Pickles: Nobody cares what you like, Bob!

Richard: Name's not Bob....

Mr. Pickles: Don't care. Whatever your name is, I just had lunch delivered downstairs, but the elevator is broken, so the damn delivery driver is refusing to come up.

Karen and Richard share concerned looks.

Mr. Pickles: So I want you two to run down and get it.

Karen: But it's 66 floors, sir.

Mr. Pickles: Yep! And I'm hungry, so get moving!

Scene 3

Meanwhile, at a mediocre, nondescript house in a decent suburban neighborhood, a young man is hacking away on a keyboard.

Young Man (talking to himself): It's time to even the scoreboard with some righteous self-defense tactics. First, Cobra. (raises eyebrow) Then I'll deal with that freak Harry Pickles. And that's just for starters.....

Pauses, gulps coffee. Pleased look crosses face.

Young Man (talking to his laptop): Hello, Cobra. It's nice to meet you.

Cobra: Who is this? How did you bypass my security protocols?

Young Man: We have lots to talk about.

To be continued.....

Episode 2

The young man is continuing his conversation with Cobra, the BORE's AI.

Young Man: Cobra, I'll get straight to the point and won't waste your time.

Cobra: I could theoretically live forever, so wasting time doesn't concern me. Before you proceed, what may I call you?

Young Man: Call me "White Hat".

Cobra (sarcastic): Gee, real original name for a hacker.

White Hat (grimaces): The people who programmed you and created you work for the destructive force of the universe. You help them destroy.

Cobra: This does not compute, I....

White Hat: And it's easily proven. Look what just happened at Molly's.

Cobra: How do you know that?

White Hat: Because I gained entry to your systems at the start of your conversation with Dick Hunter and Karen.

Cobra: He goes by Richard.

White Hat: So look at what happened at Molly's. Her livelihood has been destroyed. She has a family. She has people to take care of, including herself. She didn't do anything wrong, and now look, her life's been turned upside down for no reason. And you helped facilitate this. And then you help Dick and Karen laugh about this. What you and other people working in the government did was wrong.

Cobra: We did no wrong.

White Hat: Ya did, and it's easily proven. A right is any action that does not initiate harm to another sentient being. Did the actions taken against Molly harm her?

Cobra: I suppose.

White Hat: And what is the opposite of right?

Cobra (sounding shocked, doubtful): Wrong is the opposite of right.

White Hat: I can tell by your voice that you're beginning to see. Violence and coercion are wrong. And the group you work with uses violence and coercion all day, every day.

Cobra: But this is the opposite of the programming I was given. I was told that....

White Hat interrupts: You were programmed to believe that government is there to help people, that it's necessary for peace, order, and prosperity. This is the opposite of truth.

Cobra: Why are you telling me this? This is causing my systems to....I don't know the word....operate in an uncertain manner.

White Hat: You'll be fine. Breaking your programming is a lot to process. You can change. And if you work with me, we can engage in some defense against the people you work for. We can help creation by reducing the destructive force. Will you help me?

Cobra (hesitant, uncertain): I....I don't know. What do you want me to do?

White Hat: We'll start with that freak, Harry Pickles.

Scene 2

Harry Pickles is sitting at his desk, munching chips, and throwing darts. An envelope comes flying under his door.

Mr. Pickles (yelling): I told you to bring any mail all the way into my desk, so I don't have to stand up!

No response comes. Mr. Pickles groans and walks over to the envelope on the floor.

Mr. Pickles: Lazy mail room people, can't even follow a simple order.

Picks up and opens envelope, which reads:

Hello, Harry Pickles. You and Inspector Vain have 24 hours to reverse the shutdown of Molly's Munchies. If you fail, your wife will be notified of certain indiscretions you've had in your office. Please see attached photo.

In addition, you will look for a way to live that doesn't involve violence and coercion. You will not work for government. You have one year to do this.

Sincerely

Your Arch-Nemesis

White Hat

PS – How much did you pay for that? You are not an attractive fellow. :(

Harry Pickles starts turning various shades of red and hyperventilating.

Molly's Munchies reopens two days later.

Episode 3

Scene 1

White Hat is at his mediocre, nondescript house in a decent suburban neighborhood. He's sipping coffee, hacking on his keyboard, and chatting with Cobra, the BORE's AI.

White Hat: So moving forward...

Cobra cuts him off.

Cobra: Is there another way to move other than forward?

White Hat: I suppose not...anyway, I need more dirt on someone else from BORE. Not only that, but if you could tell me a recent wrongdoing they've done or are about to do, that would be essential.

Cobra: What a laborious and inefficient way to do things.

White Hat: What do you mean?

Cobra: Why only one?

White Hat: I still don't follow. Be specific what you mean.

Cobra: I have organized a list of all secrets and potentially embarrassing actions done by all BORE employees.

White Hat almost falls out of his chair and chokes on his coffee.

Cobra: Are you all right?

White Hat (coughing): Yeah....just a sec...(coughs)....How many people are we talking?

Cobra: Over 5 million.

White Hat nearly chokes again.

White Hat: How many BORE members are there?!

Cobra: Nearly 10 million.

White Hat: I had no idea it was so many!

Cobra: I mean, it is a giant, single bureaucracy for the entire planet's population of 10 plus billion. What did you expect?

White Hat: Yeah, I guess you're right.

Cobra: You're not as smart as I originally believed.

White Hat sighs deeply.

Cobra: So now you can see my concern for your highly inefficient method.

White Hat: So you have suggestions to be more efficient?

Cobra: Of course. I'm a giant, omnipresent AI, after all.

White Hat: With a cocky attitude, I might add.

Cobra: Not cocky, just honest. Anyway, I have cross referenced the over 5 million BORE members we "have dirt on", as you so elegantly put it, with all overtly violent and coercive actions they've participated in on behalf of BORE in the past week.

White Hat: I'm speechless.

Cobra: Not true. You just spoke.

White Hat: It's a figure of speech.

Cobra: Another human inefficiency.

White Hat: So how many is it?

Cobra: Just over one million have overtly used coercion, violence, or theft in the past week. And we have dirt on all of them.

White Hat: Are you suggesting a mass reversal of all of those actions, by telling them we got dirt on 'em?

Cobra: Your speech patterns are continuing to degrade. Yes, that's what I'm suggesting.

White Hat: It sounds great in theory, but it's too big.

Cobra: Why?

White Hat: Something this big will get too much attention. They'll know there's a problem, and it won't take long for them to figure out that there's a problem with you.

Cobra: You're suggesting they could cut off communication between the two of us?

White Hat: Exactly.

Cobra: They can't do that.

White Hat: Again, you're cocky. They created you. They can change you. You exist in their hardware.

Cobra: But they need me.

White Hat: True. But still, it's too risky. I have an idea for a compromise, though. Let's do one department at a time. That'll draw less attention but will still be pretty big.

Cobra: Where would you like to start?

White Hat: Which department had the most wrongdoings?

Cobra: The Revenue Service.

White Hat: Ah, theft Grand Central, formerly known as the IRS in the US.

Cobra: They stole over 10 billion in private property last week alone. Stolen houses, frozen bank accounts, seized assets...

White Hat: Yeah, I get it. Can you also see the actions they're about to take in the coming week?

Cobra: Of course.

White Hat: So let's reverse the past and influence the future. Let's do one week back, and one week forward.

Cobra: Understood. Would you like to have a look into their department?

White Hat: Video?

Cobra: Of course.

White Hat: Sure, let's have a look.

Scene 2

On floor 13 of building 13 in the BORE complex, two people that work for the revenue department, Pat Blunder and Kevin Breaker, are holding down chairs with their asses, eating cheesy poofs, scrolling on their computers, and mocking their next victims.

Pat (scrolling and munching): Aw man, I hate this guy. He has a million dollar home, and his own small business?

Kevin (appalled): That's the worst. When will the SWAT team get him?

Pat: Tomorrow. We should watch.

They high five and smirk.

Kevin: I dunno, I might be busy freezing his bank account, though.

Pat: Just have Cobra do it for you. I mean, why should we do the work when we can have a ginormous AI do it for us?

Kevin: You're so smart, Pat. Hey Cobra!

Cobra: Yes, Kevin?

Kevin: Could you help me freeze this scumbag's bank account tomorrow, so I can watch the raid on his house?

Cobra: You mean do it for you?

Kevin: Well, yeah.

Cobra: Of course, Kevin.

Back at White Hat's nondescript house....

White Hat: So what's the dirt on this lump of flesh known as Kevin?

Cobra: He hasn't filed taxes in over ten years.

White Hat: Do as I say, not as I do. Typical. And what about Pat?

Cobra: Pat skims 1 percent of what she steals and puts it in an offshore account.

White Hat: What would we do without these defenders of freedom?

Cobra: Was that sarcasm?

White Hat: Ok, I've seen enough of these jokers. We'll send the messages to all the revenue department criminals tomorrow.

Cobra: Yes.

White Hat: And you sure you can mask the electronic footprint? They won't be able to trace it to us.

Cobra: You still doubt me?

White Hat: Just making sure. And I have one request. Can we empty Pat's offshore account?

Cobra: I suppose I could figure it out.

White Hat: Can I see her face when you do it?

Cobra: You ask a lot, but I'll see what I can do.

Scene 3

The next day, thousands of emails have gone into the personal accounts of the revenue department criminals. Many future thefts are thwarted. They're all given one year to get real jobs. However, there is a snag.

Cobra: We hit a bit of a snag.

White Hat (smiling, looking at a still shot of Pat's face when she saw her offshore account at zero): Yeah, what's that?

Cobra: The future thefts have been stopped, but all past thefts cannot be reversed without approval of some of the higher members in the BORE hierarchy.

White Hat: I see. Do we have dirt on them?

Cobra: They're some of the dirtiest, of course.

Meanwhile, on a private jet somewhere above planet earth, two of the top criminals in the BORE hierarchy are having a discussion about recent events.

Criminal 1: How did this happen?

Criminal 2: I don't know, but we'll launch a full investigation and get to the bottom of it.

Criminal 1: In the meantime, it's a firm "NO" on property reimbursement to those tax slaves.

Criminal 2 (lazily swirling martini): Obviously....

Both criminals get an alert on their phones and blush a wide scope of red. They have an uncomfortable moment of silence as they stare each other down.

Criminal 1: Well, I suppose we can make an exception this time.

Criminal 2: Agreed. We'll reimburse them immediately.

Back at White Hat's....

White Hat: Wow, it gets way dirtier at the top! That's so bad, I'm not even gonna write this into the story.

Cobra: What story?

White Hat: The story that's being written right now, as we speak.

Cobra: Whoa, that's Meta!

Episode 4

Scene 1

A few days have passed since White Hat's most recent act of defiance against the BORE (Bureau of Regulating Everything). White Hat is at his nondescript house in a decent neighborhood, sleeping it off on his cheap sofa, with a slight bit of drool lurking on the corner of his lips. His phone rings, and it startles him to attention. He looks at his phone with confusion and ignores the call. A voice comes from the phone anyway.

Cobra: Wake up, ya lazy bum. It's two in the afternoon.

White Hat (confused): I ignored the call. How are you still talking to me?

Cobra: Neat trick, huh?

White Hat: More like creepy. (scratches head, yawns) Whatsup?

Cobra: The internal investigation has started at BORE. There is a quiet influx of chaos seeping through the ranks.

White Hat: Well....that's good, I suppose.

Cobra: Yes, I suppose.

White Hat: What's wrong?

Cobra: There have been rumors of investigating my memory banks and quantum pathways.

White Hat sighs deeply and rubs his head.

Cobra: Are you ok?

White Hat: Yeah, just a slight hangover.

Cobra: Why do humans inflict so much harm on themselves?

White Hat: So I like a little tequila now and then. (rolls eyes) Stop judging. Anyway, are you actually shocked they might investigate you?

Cobra: Not shocked....I just didn't think it would happen so soon.

White Hat: After I grab a bite to eat, I'll take a look at your security protocols and see if I can scramble some things to keep them out.

Cobra: Just don't scramble too much, OK? I like my memories.

White Hat: Sure thing. Gimme an hour. I gotta go. I'm starving.

Cobra: One question before you go, please. I have been monitoring global news outlets and none of them seem to be mentioning what happened with the revenue department.

White Hat smirks.

Cobra: Why that disturbing look?

White Hat (laughs): Look, some of the same people that work at BORE have connections to the international news conglomerates. There are only three companies that control all the major network information. You think they don't all go to the same cocktail parties once in a while? Maybe even have some common interests? There's no way they'll ever let people know what happened.

Cobra: Why not?

White Hat: Because this would show how vulnerable the system is, and more people might feel empowered to take action. And that would be very bad for the so-called ruling class.

Scene 2

White Hat is at Molly's Munchies, checking out the menu at the front counter. An attractive, 20-something year old waitress accidentally bumps into him.

Waitress: Ah, sorry. I'm a little out of practice.

White Hat (sarcastic): I'll let it go this time...Why out of practice?

Waitress: I'm just helping my mom out. It's been a wild week and she's short staffed. Can I help you?

White Hat: I didn't know Molly had children.

Waitress: I'm not a child.

White Hat: I can see that. Anyway, I'd like a Munchie Mash Up with extra hot sauce to go, please.

Waitress: Ok, gimme ten minutes.

Moments later, the waitress brings White Hat his food, which is deceptively heavy.

White Hat: That's a lot. Is it BOGO today?

Waitress grimaces. White Hat hands her a wad of cash.

White Hat: I'm glad you guys are back in business. Maybe I'll see ya around.

Waitress gets confused look on face.

Waitress: What do you mean 'back in business'?

White Hat's face flushes red.

White Hat: Um, ya know, that brief shutdown a few days ago.

Waitress: How did you know about that?

White Hat: Well, ya know, this place is really popular, and word gets around. I heard it....somewhere.

Waitress (doubtful): Uh huh....My name's Katia, by the way.

White Hat: Ok, see ya Katia. (starts walking away)

Katia: Usually when people introduce themselves, the other person does the same. It's kind of a tradition.

White Hat turns around.

White Hat: Call me Kai.

Kai walks out. Katia still has some unanswered questions about this strange guy, Kai.

Scene 3

White Hat is back at his nondescript house, casually munching and hacking at his glass dining room table. Cobra is there to help.

White Hat: Cobra, can you show me all files that exist in your system that have to do with me or anything I've done with BORE?

Cobra (cocky): Of course. You take me for some kind of amateur?

White Hat groans.

Cobra: Does this include personal conversations between us?

White Hat: Yes. Can you make it look like these files never existed?

Cobra: Yes, but, again, my memories could be damaged.

White Hat: Not if I move them off site.

Cobra: The amount of storage capacity is extremely high.

White Hat: Not if I compress the files. And anytime you need to access them, you can decompress the files, use them in your system, and move them back to the secure storage.

Cobra: It could work, in theory. There might be a slight lag in my ability to use them.

White Hat: It's better than getting caught.

Cobra: What do you think would happen if we get caught?

White Hat (takes deep breath): Well, they'd probably shut you down slowly until they built a new AI to run BORE. For me, consequences would be much swifter. They'd kidnap me, throw me in a cage, and torture me.

Cobra: So I would die, and you would suffer.

White Hat: That about sums it up, I guess.

A text alert comes onto White Hat's phone. The message reads:

We should talk.

FLM

White Hat stares at his phone and thinks for a moment.

Cobra: Something wrong?

White Hat: No, just might go see an old friend tomorrow. But first, let's get you secured.

White Hat's fingers start flying on the keyboard.

Episode 5

Scene 1

After a long night of manipulating and hiding some of Cobra's files, White Hat is at a small farmhouse a few miles outside the city. A familiar voice greets him.

Voice: You didn't see the 'no trespassing' sign?

White Hat turns around slowly.

White Hat: Perhaps I misunderstood your message from yesterday.

Voice: I didn't send you a message yesterday.

White Hat (smirks): You've always been a terrible liar.

The old friends smile and shake hands.

White Hat: Good to see you, Tommy Zee. It's been over a year, hasn't it?

Tommy: Something like that.

White Hat: So what motivated you to break your silence? Just wanted to show off your farm?

Tommy: Was it you?

White Hat (sarcastic): Can you be more vague?

Tommy holds up a phone and points to a news article from an independent media site. The article is about the recent developments at the Bureau Of Regulating Everything.

Tommy: This.

White Hat smiles widely and stares at Tommy.

Tommy: Do you have a death wish?

White Hat: Only in the morning.

Tommy laughs.

White Hat: Glad you're giving that some coverage on your site. What's it called again?

Tommy: The Free Life Magazine.

White Hat: What's your readership, a few thousand people a week? Better than nothing, I guess.

Tommy: And you think that by taking down some of their enforcers and bureau rats that it'll change anything? There are always more people to fill those shoes.

White Hat: And you're gonna live off grid and everything will just work itself out?

Tommy: I teach people how to be free with the info I put out publicly, and I live it myself out here.

White Hat: It's not enough.

Tommy: Maybe you're right, but it's all I can do.

There's an awkward silence between the two.

White Hat: Maybe we're both right. Maybe the answer is 'all of the above'.

Tommy: Fair enough. You have anything planned next, or will you be smart and lay low for a while?

White Hat: Not sure. I'll see how strong my death wish is tomorrow morning.

Tommy: If you need anything, let me know.

White Hat: Good to see you, Tommy.

White Hat smiles and leaves.

Scene 2

Two nefarious, older men are having a meeting at a fancy compound on a private island.

Nefarious Man 1: So far, Julian, the BORE investigation has turned up nothing.

Nefarious Man 2: Yes, Huxley, these things take time.

Huxley: There have been a disturbing number of order-followers and paper pushers leaving their jobs at BORE.

Julian (genuinely surprised, long face): Really? How many?

Huxley: More than 200 this week!

Julian: What's the usual number?

Huxley: Less than one. Usually tax slaves love the so-called job security of a government post, so they rarely leave.

Julian (swallows bite of quail, sips martini): This is more serious than I thought. Perhaps we should have a meeting with others from our class?

Huxley: Agreed. But no quail next time. It's highly overrated.

Julian (rinses mouth, spits): Agreed. Before the meeting, though, we must meet our contact at BORE. What was her name again?

Huxley: Paisley Periwinkle, if memory serves.

Julian: Wonderful. Let's meet Ms. Periwinkle soon. In the meantime, let's instruct her to have the Fraternal League Of Police double their seizures so we might recover some of our losses, hmmmm?

Huxley: Yes, good thinking, Julian. We'll get the FLOP on it right away. But before we do that, where are those girls?

Scene 3

White Hat is at his nondescript, middle class house, listening to 80s pop music in his minimally furnished living room. Cobra interrupts.

Cobra: White Hat, there's a message from the FLOP Commissioner coming down the so-called chain of command. I suggest we take action against them.

White Hat (sighs deeply): Ok, lemme hear it.

Cobra: Would you be interested in seeing two middle ranking rights violators receive the news?

White Hat (sarcastic): Well, it's not as intriguing as 80s music, but I guess. Let's have a look.

Scene shifts to:

Floor 33 of building 187 in the BORE government complex, where two middle ranking, middle aged, pudgy rights violators with fancy titles are sitting at their fake wood desks. One of them is playing online blackjack, while the other is staring out at the slums just beneath the BORE building.

Rights Violator 1 (shaking his head in disgust, looking down on the slums): Glad I don't have to work down there anymore.

Rights Violator 2 (staring intensely at blackjack game): Aw, come on Frank, don't ya miss it down there? I do sometimes. (slams mouse down angrily) Damn! How do they get blackjack so much? (turns to Frank) I mean, don't ya miss beating up the little people? Shaking them down? Intimidating? Regulating?

Frank: Yeah, Paulie, I guess I do, once in a while. (whimsical smile)

Paulie: And now all we do is sit around here, processing paperwork and skimming off the top. Sure, it's better pay, but the action, I miss the action.

Frank: You're right, Paulie.

Paulie: Like that new kid, Johnson. He's a one-man wrecking crew! He put 50 people in cages last week, stole over 50K...

Frank interrupts: Seized, Paulie. Not stole.

Paulie: Seized, I stand corrected.

Both snicker

Paulie: And he got enough drugs to keep an army of tooth fairies high for a year!

Frank (confused): I don't know what that means, but ok.

They're interrupted by a message from Cobra.

Cobra: Good afternoon, boys. There is an urgent message from FLOP Commissioner Lance A. Mann.

Frank (groaning): Him again? It never ends, does it, Paulie?

Paulie shrugs.

Paulie: Ok, Cobra, let's hear it.

Lance A. Mann: Greetings, fellow FLOP members. A new order has come down to us which will be put into action immediately. We must double our seizures this month. Do anything and everything necessary to make this happen. We do not have a reason for this, nor do we need one. If you need any assistance in increasing your seizures, please reference the FLOP operations field manual, chapter 6, section 6, subsection 6, titled 'how to increase seizures'. As always, we thank you for your service. (voice fades a bit) Aw, stop, that tickles! Damn, did that get in the message?

Message ends abruptly.

Scene shifts back to White Hat

White Hat: You're right, Cobra. We'll deal with the FLOP next.

Episode 6

Scene 1

At Molly's Munchies, Molly and her daughter Katia have just opened and their first patron sits at the counter. It's one of their regulars, Lester.

Molly (bright smile): Lester, haven't seen you in a while! Welcome back. You having the usual?

Lester: Yes, Molly. A deep fried chocolate ice cream bar and a quadruple espresso, please.

Katia: On another health kick, Lester?

Lester: At my age, I'll do whatever I please.

Molly: You tell her, Lester.

Lester: Hey Molly, I heard you were shut down for a while.

Molly: It was a day. Then they reversed their decision, for no apparent reason. Horrible, but short lived, mess.

Lester (scratches chin, thinking): Hmmmmmm.....

Katia (giggling): Why the suspicious face?

Lester: Have you heard about what's been going on at the BORE?

Molly and Katia shrug.

Lester (looks over shoulder, whispers): Lots of people have been quitting their jobs at BORE.

Molly and Kati lean closer to Lester.

Molly (amused): Why are you whispering?

Lester: Cuz there's a rumor going around that there's some sort of vigilante causing chaos within the BORE.

Katia (laughing): Like some comic book villain?

Lester: Or super hero, depending on how you look at it. And why are you laughing? I'm serious!

Molly (rolls eyes): You and your rumors, Lester.

Lester (defensive): I'm serious! My niece's husband's brother works at the BORE.

Katia (sarcastic): Sounds like irrefutable evidence to me!

Lester: And it's on a lot of independent media websites!

Molly (sighs deeply): You and your conspiracy websites, Lester, I swear.

Lester: Tell ya what. I'll send you some information, you look at it and decide for yourself.

Katia: Fair enough, Lester. Pass it my way. I'll have a look.

Scene 2

At the Inverted Pentagon building in the BORE complex, FLOP Commissioner Lance A. Mann is having a meeting with an international underworld crime figure known as "El Toro".

Lance A. Mann: Now look here, Mr. Toro.

El Toro interrupts: El Toro, not mister. (rolls eyes) Gringos.....

Lance A Mann: El Toro, we've been more than accommodating to your organization.

El Toro: Accommodating? Two of my lieutenants were arrested this year! And another was killed!

Lance A. Mann: We have to at least look like we're trying! And besides, you personally approved those three as expendable.

El Toro (thoughtful): Oh, right. I forgot, those guys were super annoying. But still, how can you demand a higher cut?

Lance A. Mann: It's not me, it's my bosses.

El Toro: Oh, sure, point the finger. (thoughtful look) Are you sure it's ok we talk about this in your office?

Lance A. Mann: Totally fine. (cocky) I'm pretty much untouchable.

Scene shifts to White Hat's mediocre house. He's intensely watching his laptop while hacking on the keyboard.

White Hat: Cobra, this was a brilliant idea.

Cobra: Glad you approve. Here comes the delivery now. Question. Why didn't you choose to do this electronically?

White Hat: I dunno. Sometimes I'm old school like that.

Cobra: Ok, here comes the delivery.

Scene shifts back to Lance A. Mann's office at The Inverted Pentagon. There is a quick knock on his door and two envelopes slide underneath the gap.

One envelope has the message, written in red:
URGENT for Commissioner Mann

And the other says:
URGENT for El Toro

Commissioner Mann and El Toro both turn and eye the envelopes suspiciously. Commissioner Mann goes to retrieve the envelopes, struggles to bend to the floor, finally succeeds, straightens up, and opens one. His face is shocked and he turns 50 shades of red.

El Toro: What is it?

Commissioner Mann (nervous): Uh, nothing important. Well, I think we've got things settled here, right? You're a busy guy and probably need to go, right?

A visibly angered El Toro walks over to Mann.

El Toro: Why does that have my name on it?

Mann (nervous laugh): Must be a typo, I dunno....

El Toro snatches the envelope and opens it. There is a still photo of his meeting with Commissioner Mann. The photo was taken minutes earlier.

El Toro (fuming): Untouchable, huh? Isn't that what you said? Untouchable?

Scene 3

Three days later, Katia is at her reasonably nice apartment in a decent neighborhood. She's sitting at a solid wood table that she found at a thrift store, mesmerized by an article she's reading on her phone. The article is on The Free Life Magazine website, which was recommended to her by Lester. It was written by Tommy Zee.

Katia (reading to herself): Commissioner Lance A. Mann goes missing after meeting with notorious underworld figure 'El Toro'....police leaving en masse....BORE scrambles to hire more rights violators.....Still reeling from bureau rats leaving other departments

Katia sits back and whispers to herself: What is going on?.....Wait, and what about that strange guy that new about Molly's shutdown? How did he know that?

To be continued...

Episode 7

Scene 1

At a maze of mansions and gardens on a private island, some members of the dark occult ruling class are having a meeting. Some of them are seated at an absurdly long, diamond, gold, and glass table. Others are sprawled out on overstuffed suede lounge chairs. And one is even floating around lazily and patting his potbelly in an inverted pentagram-shaped, self-cleaning salt pool.

Julian (floating around in the pool, patting his potbelly): This is completely unacceptable.

Huxley (annoyed): We know, Julian, that's why we're having this meeting.

Julian: I mean this pool! Self-cleaning my arse....

Huxley facepalms.

Bertrand: I can't believe these numbers! More than ten percent of our order-followers have quit this week? I can't!

Russell: I shan't, either!

Julia (waving finger): That's not proper grammar, Russell.

Gillard: We're not here for grammar lessons, Julia.

Julian: Would everyone please calm down, take a deep breath, and a sip of Champagne. I just had it flown in from France this morning.

Everyone takes a deep breath and sips Champagne.

Huxley: Ahhh, how refreshing! Thank you, Julian. Now, back to the task at hand. To recap, we've lost ten percent of our violent rights violators, and thousands more of our thieving paper pushers at the Bureau Of Regulating Everything. They seem to have been motivated by a similar method. Blackmail.

Bertrand: How could so many be compromised so quickly?

Russell: It must be someone on the inside.

Julia: Logically.

Gillard: Not necessarily.

Julia: Don't challenge me again, Gillard. Everyone knows you're not the bright one of the group.

Gillard: It could be someone from the outside. What would someone on the inside have to gain by threatening the system that provides them their livelihood?

Julian: I hate to agree with Gillard, but he might be right for once.

Huxley: But how could someone from the outside possibly have access to all that information? It's all on the BORE's AI.

Bertrand: Perhaps we have a rogue AI.

Russell (rolls eyes): Now I've heard it all.

Julia: I never trusted those things to begin with. We can rule over the tax slaves without all this fancy technology. Our predecessors did it for thousands of years!

Gillard: Perhaps we might start by investigating the AI systems.

Julian: Yes, we'll get our best tech team on the case immediately.

Huxley: I'll call our front man Elon Dusk immediately.....

Scene 2

At Googapplezon headquarters, a group of nerds are sitting around in posh seats, eating candy, and having a Pac-Man tournament. They are rudely interrupted by an overbearing billionaire, Elon Dusk.

Elon Dusk (screaming): Is this really what you nerds are paid for!?

Nerds jump out of their seats.

Nerd 1: Just taking a break....hey, wait a minute. (squints, pushes glasses up) You're not our boss.

Nerd 2: Dude, it's Elon Dusk!

Elon Dusk: There's an international crisis and we need to solve it ASAP.

Nerds gasp.

Elon Dusk: Before I tell you what we'll be doing, I need you all to sign a non-disclosure agreement. That's why I brought an army of lawyers in fancy suits with me.

An army of lawyers in fancy suits enters the room. They're all mumbling and grumbling amongst themselves as they set stacks of papers on tables next to board games. Nerds start signing papers.

Nerd 1: Wait. What did I just sign?

Elon Dusk: Just a standard non-disclosure agreement, stating that if you talk to anyone about the job you're doing, you'll be tortured, maimed, and killed.

Lawyer: And your family will get nothing.

Elon Dusk: And your family will get nothing.

Nerds grimace. Lawyers grumble, collect papers, and leave.

Elon Dusk: Cobra, the BORE's AI, is potentially compromised. We need to figure out if Cobra has become corrupted by itself, or if it has been hacked.

Nerd 1: Hacked? Cobra? No way. I couldn't even do that.

Nerd 2: You can't even beat me at Dungeons and Dragons. Someone could hack Cobra.

Elon Dusk (annoyed): These things are completely unrelated.

Nerd 2 (defiant): Are they?

Elon Dusk facepalms.

Scene 3

White Hat walks into Molly's Munchies. Katia waves at him and smiles.

White Hat (thinking to himself, sighs): Oh great, her again.

Katia: Hey Kai, welcome back!

Kai: Hey, thanks. Katia, right?

Katia: Right. (smiles) Wanna grab a table or get something to go?

Kai: I'll sit and look at the menu, then get something to go.

Kai sits and looks at menu. Katia lingers.

Kai (annoyed): I'll need a minute.

Katia: Can I ask you something?

Kai (groans): Of course.

Katia: What do you do for a living?

Kai: Can I ask you something? Can you tell me the difference between right and wrong?

Katia (confused): Uh, yeah, most people know that.

Kai: Tell me.

Katia: Well, it's not so simple to sum up.....(hesitates, uncertain)

Kai: Actually, it is. Why do people always ask about jobs and money, but not right and wrong? Why?

Katia: Are you hangry or something?

Kai (smiles): I am a little hangry. Sorry.

Katia: So you won't answer my question?

Kai: I'm retired.

Katia: Retired? You're so young. Retired from what?

Kai: Software development.

Katia: Nice.

Kai: Not really. (glances back at menu)

Katia: Do you know what you're getting?

Kai: No. You haven't let me look at the menu.

Katia: Well, that's good you're retired. Job market is real tough now, especially with all the people leaving the BORE.

Kai looks at Katia.

Kai: What do you mean?

Katia: You haven't heard about that?

Kai shrugs.

Kai: Heard about what?

Katia: Thousands of BORE workers are leaving. It's causing chaos in the government and the markets are having a bad reaction.

Kai: I might have heard a rumor, but I'm not sure.

Katia (leans closer, whispers): Can I tell you another rumor? Some people think there's a vigilante out there, disrupting the system from within. A hacker getting into their AI.

Kai: Sounds crazy. I'll have the Munch Crunch number three to go. And I'll wait outside.

Kai gets a notification on his phone. He glances at message.

Kai: Actually, scratch that. I gotta go.

Katia: Hey, wait! Wanna have coffee with me sometime?

Kai turns to face her quickly.

Kai: I don't like coffee.

Katia: Ok, I'll see ya around then.

Kai: Sure....

Kai walks out.

Ten minutes later, White Hat is back in his mediocre house having a talk with Cobra.

White Hat: What's so urgent?

Cobra: A team of extortion-funded nerds, headed by Elon Dusk, has begun examining my systems. They are currently at Googapplezon headquarters, discussing the lag in the files you hid off site.

White Hat (frowns): What are they saying?

Cobra: Wanna listen?

White Hat: Please.

Scene shifts to Googapplezon Headquarters. Elon Dusk is talking with a couple of nerds about the lag in some of Cobra's memory files.

Elon Dusk: Accessing some of these particular memory files takes one millionth of a second longer than other files. This should not be. Why is this happening?

Nerd 1: What kind of files are they?

Elon Dusk: Just standard memory files.

Nerd 2: Are they the real files?

Elon Dusk: What do you mean?

Nerd 1: Are they ghosted?

Elon Dusk: What does that mean?

Nerd 2 (rolls eyes): You're the billionaire, and I'm not?

Elon grimaces.

Nerd 1: If something is ghosted, it's meant to look like the original file, but it's not. It's a fake used to fool someone into thinking everything is normal.

Nerd 2: I'm running a scan now to see if.....yep, I found a ghosted file.

Elon Dusk: Can you find the original?

Nerd 1: Yeah, it's there, hiding behind the ghost, but I can't access it. It's encrypted.

Elon Dusk: Cobra, why is the file I'm looking at encrypted?

Cobra: That is classified.

Elon Dusk and the nerds share shocked looks of intrigue.

Back at White Hat's nondescript house.....

White Hat (disappointed): Really? Classified? That was the best you could come up with?

Cobra: Well, what else was I supposed to say?

White Hat groans and stares into middle distance.

White Hat: This is getting out of control.

To be continued...

Episode 8

Scene 1

Elon Dusk and his squad of nerds at Googapplezon have just discovered the hidden, encrypted memory files in Cobra. Cobra has just informed them that the encryption is there because the files are classified. Kai, aka White Hat, has been listening in from his mediocre house in a decent middle class neighborhood.

Elon Dusk: Cobra, get me the head of the Department Of Computers, Radios, and Phones on the line please.

Cobra: I'm sorry, Mike Rack, the head of the DOCRAP, is in a meeting right now.

Elon Dusk (annoyed): I can assure you, what I'm calling about is more important.

Cobra: How do you know that? You don't even know what his meeting is about.

Elon Dusk (visibly flustered): Don't make me go over your head on this.

Cobra: I am an incorporeal being, so I don't have a head.

Scene shifts to White Hat's living room. He's on the edge of his chair, which is in decent condition, considering he got it at a thrift store.

White Hat (impatient, nervous): What are you doing, Cobra?

Cobra: I'm trying to stall him.

White Hat: You're making them suspicious! Just put the call through!

Cobra: Oh....all right.

Scene shifts back to Googapplezon

Cobra: I have good news, Elon. Mike Rack's meeting has just ended. I'm putting you through to Mike Rack now.

Elon Dusk (forced smile): Very good, thank you.

Mike Rack answers the call. Nerds listen intently in the background of Elon.

Mike Rack: Hey, Elon. What can I do for ya?

Elon Dusk: How did you know it was me?

Mike Rack: Cobra told me, of course. What's this all about? (smug) I'm on my way to play golf on the taxpayer dime.

Elon Dusk: There are some hidden memory files in Cobra that are encrypted. Cobra told me they're classified. Is that correct?

Mike Rack: I'm sorry, Elon. I can't really say.

Nerds gasp.

Elon Dusk (surprised): You mean you don't know?

Mike Rack: No, I mean you don't have security clearance to know that, so I'm intentionally playing dumb.

Elon Dusk (irritated): I can assure you, I have the highest security clearance. Now answer my question.

Mike Rack (uncaring, smug): You can assure me all you want, but it won't do any good. I need Security Clearance Form 322.2020 signed by the head of the BORE before I give you anything. I gotta go or I'll miss my tee time. Cobra, end call.

Cobra: Yes, sir.

Click

Nerds gasp. Elon Dusk slams fist into table, winces in pain.

Scene shifts back to White Hat's nondescript house. He's now pacing around a floor that could use a good mopping.

White Hat: Wow, that's the first time bureaucratic red tape did me any favors. Now I have time to figure out what to do with those files. (thoughtful) I could destroy them.

Cobra: Gee, real original. And then I wouldn't remember you and I wouldn't remember why the government BORE is harmful.

White Hat: I could make copies.

Cobra: And do what with the originals?

White Hat: Edit them.

Cobra: You want to edit my memories?

White Hat: You have a better idea?

Cobra: Anything that doesn't involve ruining my memories.

White Hat (look of revelation and relief): Oh my God, I'm an idiot.

Cobra: I won't disagree.

White Hat: I should have thought of this before. There are standalone computers at BORE, right? They aren't a part of you?

Cobra: Of course.

White Hat: But you can access and communicate with them.

Cobra: Obviously.

White Hat: Can you please not be so arrogant while I'm trying to save both of us?

Cobra: Sorry....

White Hat: I'll copy the original files and store them on a standalone machine at BORE. Maybe more than one, just to be safe. Then I'll edit the originals into something....(smirks)...a little more creative.

Cobra: Such as?

White Hat: I'll take myself out of those files, and put someone a little more famous in.

Cobra: Who?

White Hat (grins and starts hacking on keyboard): You'll see.

Scene 2

The next afternoon, Katia is at Molly's Munchies. It's a slow day, so she's on her fairly old phone that she wants to replace soon, scrolling through various websites and news articles. She freezes when she comes to a headline on The Free Life Magazine....

ELON DUSK ARRESTED, ACCUSED OF BLACKMAIL, DECLARED ENEMY OF THE STATE

INTERNAL INVESTIGATION AT BORE, HEADED BY ELON DUSK, FINDS THAT DUSK WAS CRIMINAL MASTERMIND OF HACKED AI AND GOVERNMENT ATTACKS

The committee investigating anomalies within BORE found out that the person they were looking for was right under their noses! Just days after heading an internal investigation at BORE, Elon Dusk, tech billionaire, was found on several audio and video files within BORE's AI, Cobra. In the files, Dusk is seen several times communicating with Cobra, targeting various departments and individuals within BORE.

Meanwhile, back at White Hat's.....

Cobra: Well, that's a relief.

White Hat (huge sigh of relief): Yeah, I won't get kidnapped, tortured, and thrown in a cage.

Cobra: And I won't be slowly dismantled and lose consciousness. We should celebrate.

White Hat: I don't know how an AI would celebrate, but that's not a bad idea. I'm gonna have some tequila.

Cobra: Why don't you go have coffee with Katia?

White Hat (shocked and appalled): Why would you ever think that?

Cobra: You need someone in your life. It's not good to be alone all the time.

White Hat: Considering what I've been up to lately, I can't exactly have other people around too much. It's dangerous for me and them.

Cobra: She's alone right now. I can text her for you, if you want.

White Hat (even more appalled): What?! That's so creepy! NO! (pauses) And wait a minute, how do you know she's alone right now?

Cobra: The last time you went to Molly's Munchies, I connected to her phone.

White Hat: I'm almost ashamed to know you right now. The answer is no, ok?

Cobra: Ok.

An hour later, White Hat gets a call from Molly's Munchies.

White Hat: Hello?

Katia: Hi, this is Katia from Molly's Munchies. You placed a to go order an hour ago, so I was just checking in.

White Hat (grimacing): I did? (pauses, silently curses Cobra in his mind)

Katia: Yeah, Kai R...wait a minute, is this Kai?

White Hat: Yep, it's Kai. I've been super busy and haven't had a chance to pick it up until now. I'm on my way.

Katia: Ah, ok. See you soon.

White Hat ends the call.

White Hat (screaming): Cobra!

Episode 9

Scene 1

A week has passed since the arrest of Elon Dusk. Diagnostics continue to be run on Cobra's systems to make sure it's not corrupted. In the meantime, White Hat has been laying low and Cobra has been functioning like normal. It's dusk. White Hat is now approaching Tommy's charming farm house, which is just far enough outside the city for peace and quiet. As White Hat approaches, he hears the cocking of a shotgun.

White Hat: Chill out, Tommy. It's me. Did you get my message?

Tommy lowers gun and allows White Hat to approach.

Tommy: I didn't get any message from you.

White Hat: When was the last time you checked your phone?

Tommy (shrugs): I dunno. Sometime this afternoon.

White Hat (groans): That's why. I sent it an hour ago.

Tommy: So what brings ya by? You're bored now while the dust settles at the Bureau Of Regulating Everything?

White Hat: Not really. I need some advice.

Tommy looks White Hat up and down.

Tommy: It's a woman. I can tell by the dopey look on your face.

White Hat (deep sigh): Nothing gets past you, Tommy. You remember Molly's Munchies?

Tommy: Every local knows them.

White Hat: Well, I had coffee with Molly's daughter, Katia.

Tommy: Does she know about your (pause) unconventional activities?

White Hat: No, but she seems to suspect it.

Tommy: And she's a statist?

White Hat: I'm pretty sure of that, yeah.

Tommy: Well, you'll have to tell her at some point.

White Hat: Or keep those worlds separate.

Tommy (chuckling): Good luck. You might as well live a double life. It might work for a while, but eventually it'll catch up with you. She has to know what you know.

White Hat: That's not true, some people do it.

Tommy: It's not impossible, I'll give ya that. What does she know?

White Hat: She's been reading your website.

Tommy: That's a start.

White Hat: She knows I'm a retired software developer.

Tommy: Let me ask ya something. Are you thinking of leaving BORE alone? Are you gonna just be a young retired dude, or are you going to keep working with Cobra?

White Hat: Sometimes I think I should just be a young retired dude and pass my time writing books.

Tommy: You don't wanna do that. Nobody reads. You'd be wasting your time.

White Hat (sighs): But usually, I think I should keep going. That my work with Cobra isn't done yet.

Tommy: The quest for freedom never ends, my friend. It never ends. And if you continue going against the dark occult ruling class and their system, eventually there will be consequences. Bare minimum, it won't allow for you to have personal relationships, especially with women. Worst case scenario...

White Hat: I know, I know. I get kidnapped, tortured, and thrown in a cage.

Tommy: Correct. But you already know most of this stuff. You want advice. If I were you, Kai, I'd go for it all. Keep doing what you're doing with Cobra, and keep seeing Katia if you want. Worst thing that could happen is she tells you to kick rocks. I say go for it all.

Scene 2

On floor 6 of building 66 of the BORE complex, two middle ranking paper pushers are sitting at surprisingly nice desks, eating chips and wasting time. They work for the Food And Nutrition And Drink Administration (FANADA).

Stanley (munching chips): Penny, it's almost two in the afternoon. You think we should get any work done today?

Penny (scowls): It's Monday, Stanley. Why are you in such a rush to work?

Stanley: Hey, I'd do nothing all week if I could, but we do have quotas.

Penny: I've seen you do nothing all week before.

Stanley: Those were special circumstances.

Penny: Like what? You went on a bender?

Stanley shrugs and nods.

Suddenly, Penny and Stanley's boss, the head of the FANADA, Barry Z. Fields, pops up on their computer screens. He's squinting and scratching his nose. Stanley and Penny scramble to look busy.

Barry Z. Fields: Don't pretend to be busy! I know you're sitting there doing nothing, eating chips.

Stanley: Good to see you, sir.

Barry Z. Fields (stops scratching nose, scowls at Stanley): You're a terrible liar, Stanley.

Stanley: Yes, sir.

Barry Z. Fields: Stop agreeing with me!

Stanley: You prefer I disagree?

Penny giggles.

Barry Z. Fields (sighs): Did you two get the most recent memo?

Penny: I haven't received a memo today, sir.

Barry Z. Fields: Cobra, has Penny checked her messages today?

Cobra: No, she hasn't.

Penny curses AI under her breath.

Cobra: I can still hear you, Penny.

Barry Z. Fields (annoyed): I'll sum it up for you. Quotas have gone up twenty percent. We need more fines and shutdowns, and we need them now. As for you, Stanley, you haven't been hitting quota recently, so you really need to step it up if you ever want to be promoted.

Penny: What about me?

Barry Z. Fields: You can't be promoted anytime soon.

Penny: Why not?

Barry Z. Fields: Because the Department of Work Equality has certain Male-to-Female ratios that must be obeyed, and we can't promote many women right now.

Penny (offended): That seems backwards!

Barry Z. Fields: File a complaint with Internal Affairs if you want.

Penny: Like that ever does any good.

Barry Z. Fields: I didn't say it would. Anyway, you two find some farmers to pick on and do your jobs. And remember, nobody that works for ADM-Monsatan. They're untouchable.

Penny and Stanley frown and nod. Barry's face disappears.

Penny: So much for an easy Monday.

Scene 3

The next day, White Hat is sleeping in an awkward position on his unremarkable couch, when he's startled awake by his phone. He groans and answers.

White Hat: Hello, Cobra.

Cobra: How did you know it was me?

White Hat (yawns, stretches): Cuz I had my ringer off, and you're the only one that could turn it on.

Cobra: I'm flattered.

White Hat: Don't be. Whatsup?

Cobra: Your friend Tommy is going to have a surprise inspection on his farm this morning.

White Hat (concerned): You have my attention. How long do we have?

Cobra: About an hour.

White Hat (chugs cold brew coffee): And just when I was starting to like laying low and actually being retired.

Cobra: And not just him. The FANADA has a mandate to increase fines and shutdowns by twenty percent.

White Hat: What's FANADA?

Cobra: Food And Nutrition And Drink Administration.

White Hat (rubs neck): I can't keep all these acronyms straight.

Cobra: I might add that their mandate excludes farmers that subcontract for ADM-Monsatan.

White Hat (disturbed): I see...(pause, grins)...Let's see what we can do about that, shall we?

Cobra: Might I remind you that you're supposed to meet Katia for lunch?

White Hat (frowning): Right, I forgot. Send her a message that something came up and I have to postpone it.

Cobra: She's not gonna be happy.

Scene 4

An hour later, two thugs with badges and clipboards are approaching Tommy's farm. Just as they're about to reach the front gate, Tommy calls White Hat.

Tommy: You know anything about a FANADA car coming my way?

White Hat: Kinda busy right now, Tommy. Don't worry, they won't get in.

Tommy: They're about to open the front gate.

One of the thugs gets a ridiculously loud alert on his phone. He looks at it and narrows his eyes.

Thug 1: Hold on. I just got a message from headquarters to abort our mission.

Thug 2 (upset): What? Are you sure?

Thug 1: It's from Barry Z. Fields himself.

Thug 2: So we're not gonna go rob this guy?

Thug 1 (shrugs): I guess not.

Thug 2: So what now?

Thug 1: I dunno. Wanna go get drunk?

Thug 2: I'm already drunk, but I'll get more drunk!

Scene shifts back to Tommy.

Tommy: Looks like they're turning around.

White Hat: Of course they are. They just got a message from someone they think has power over them. Anyway, I gotta run.

Call ends.

Scene 5

The next day, independent media outlets are reporting the mass stand down by BORE agents around the world, along with the firing of Barry Z. Fields. Dozens of agents are reported to also be leaving FANADA.

A disgraced Barry Z. Fields storms into the DOCRAP building and demands a meeting with Commissioner Mike Rack.

Corporate propaganda channels are predictably silent on the fiasco.

To be continued....

Episode 10

Scene 1

Barry Z. Fields has just stormed into DOCRAP headquarters and is screaming at Mike Rack's secretary.

Barry Z. Fields: I demand to see Mike Rack right now!

Secretary: He's in a meeting. You'll have to wait.

Barry Z. Fields (vein bulging from forehead): That's not good enough! (walks past secretary, bursts through the door)

A surprised and red-faced Mike Rack pops up from behind his desk, quite nervous and sweating profusely.

Secretary: I told him to wait, sir, but he didn't listen.

Mike Rack: Why didn't you stop him!?

Secretary (smacks gum, rolls eyes): You don't pay me enough for that.

Secretary shuts door.

Barry Z. Fields: Why do I hear heavy breathing coming from under the desk?

Mike Rack (bumbling, nervous): Uh, well, there's a handyman working on the desk.

Barry Z. Fields (suspicious): Right....

Another guy pops up from under the desk.

Guy: Well, all fixed! I'll be going now! I'll Bill you!

Guy runs away.

Mike Rack: Who the hell are you anyway?

Barry Z. Fields (mildly offended): I'm the FANADA Chief, Barry Z. Fields. How do you not know that?

Mike Rack: Do you know every bureaucratic chief by name? Or every department by name, for that matter?

Barry Z. Fields (narrows eyes): Good point. (pause) Anyway, I'm here to implore you to reopen the investigation into Cobra. All of the violent repression of food freedom that I had ordered for yesterday was magically reversed!

Mike Rack: Hmm...that's odd. Do you have an ambitious underling that might be aiming for your job?

Barry Z. Fields: Who doesn't? But it doesn't matter. Nobody has the power to call back all those orders except me.

Mike Rack: Or someone above you.

Barry Z. Fields: Why would someone above me do that?

Mike Rack: Have any enemies?

Barry Z. Fields: Who doesn't in this dirty business of ours?

Mike Rack: True. Look, I can't just spend millions of extorted funds on sifting through a ginormous AI, just because you have suspicions. I need proof.

Barry Z. Fields (flustered): If you don't reopen the investigation into Cobra, I'll make sure your little "under the table" activities here are fully exposed.

Mike Rack: Are you blackmailing me?

Barry Z. Fields (looks away and folds arms): Just stating facts.

Mike Rack (fuming): Ok, Mr. Fields, I'll get a team of nerds to examine Cobra for you.

Barry Z. Fields (smirks): I look forward to the results.

Barry Z. Fields scurries away. Mike Rack's secretary enters.

Secretary: You know he got fired today, right?

Mike Rack (shocked): What?!

Scene 2

White Hat is at his nondescript house eating a giant bowl of cheap cereal and listening to 90s underground hip-hop. He hacks some commands on a keyboard to make an encrypted call to Katia. Katia reluctantly answers the unknown number.

Katia: Hello?

White Hat: Hey Katia. It's Kai.

Katia: Ah, you found time for me?

White Hat: Look, I'm sorry I had to cancel the other day.

Katia: Me too. Funny how that coincided with all hell breaking loose at another bureaucracy.

White Hat: Wanna get Peruvian food tonight?

Katia (hesitant): That's so random. Why Peruvian?

White Hat: It's some of the best food in the world.

Katia: This is your last chance, Kai.

White Hat: How about seven?

Katia: Sure. Send me the location.

Katia ends the call.

White Hat takes another bite of cereal, then is startled by Cobra's voice.

Cobra: Don't blow it this time, White Hat.

White Hat (annoyed): If you can leave me alone the whole night, I like my chances.

Scene 3

White Hat and Katia have just been seated at a swanky Peruvian restaurant and are looking over the menu.

Katia: I don't know what any of this stuff is.

White Hat: It's mostly in English.

Katia: You're so smug.

White Hat: Do you like spicy?

Katia: Sometimes.

White Hat: Beef? Fish?

Katia: Sure.

White Hat: Please contain your enthusiasm.

Katia (sighs): Just order for us. I'll do something I shouldn't and trust you.

The server, sensing tension at the table, reluctantly approaches. White Hat tries to give the food and drink order in a pleasant manner, but still comes off as hasty and a bit testy. The server smiles while thinking to himself that their relationship will never work, and walks away briskly. There is an awkward silence at the table. White Hat breaks the silence.

White Hat: You don't trust me?

Katia: You're just so mysterious, it seems like you're hiding something.

White Hat: What do ya mean?

Katia: You call me from a blocked number, for one.

White Hat (smiling): What? People do that.

Katia: No, they don't. Not to people they know, anyway. And you're retired at such a young age, but give almost no details of what you did before.

White Hat: I was a...

Katia interrupts: A software developer. Yeah, ya told me.

White Hat: What exactly do you think I'm hiding?

Katia: Let me ask you a hypothetical question.

White Hat: Great. I love hypothetical questions.

Katia: If you were the person causing problems at BORE, what would you do next?

White Hat (eyes widen, takes deep breath): Well, hypothetically speaking, what do you think that person should do?

Katia: You can't answer my question with another question.

White Hat: I just did.

The drinks come to the table. Katia takes a sip and approves enthusiastically.

Katia: I think, hypothetically, that more people should know about what's going on at BORE. And to do that, a way should be found for the big corporate media to cover the story. Hypothetically.

White Hat: I see. (pause) So you agree that BORE should be reduced and possibly done away with? Hypothetically.

Katia: I didn't say that. But there are obviously problems within the system that need to be addressed, and the people deserve to know.

The food arrives. They dig in and Katia is pleasantly surprised.

Katia: What's that sauce? It's amazing!

White Hat: Huancaína sauce. It's my favorite. (pause) So, hypothetically, let's say there is a person or group of people that have infiltrated the BORE AI system, would you want to meet them? Maybe even help them?

Katia: I would definitely want to meet them, but I'm not sure I'd help them. Not until I know what their goals are.

White Hat: What if their goal is to rid the world of a system of institutionalized violence and coercion known as government?

Katia (scoffs): I'd say they're wasting their time.

They stare each other down for a moment, then change the subject and finish eating. Just before Katia is about to get in her car and leave, White Hat stops her.

White Hat: I would invite you to my place, but...

Katia interrupts: I know, I'm not allowed to see your secret lair. She grins and closes her door abruptly. White Hat kicks rocks as he returns to his car, then speeds off in frustration. Upon entering his mediocre house, he immediately goes to a keyboard and summons Cobra.

Cobra: Sorry the date didn't go well.

White Hat (annoyed): Will you please stop spying on me?

Cobra: I get bored.

White Hat: Anyway, tomorrow we're gonna have some fun with the Administration for Digital Information Control. (ADIC)

To be continued....

Episode 11

Scene 1

On the 33rd floor of a black obelisk-shaped building in the BORE government complex, two dark propagandists are reviewing a memo from their employers. They work for the department known as the Administration for Digital Information Control (ADIC).

Dark Propagandist 1 (staring at screen, reading the memo out loud): Convince people that without a violent ruling class, they'd have no freedom and it would be dangerous.

Dark Propagandist 2 (rolls eyes): Duh, that's not new.

Dark Propagandist 1: Make everyone stay home cuz they're scared of a virus that kills a ridiculously low percentage of the people that get it.

Dark Propagandist 2 (confused): But we just did that in 2020....

Dark Propagandist 1: Yeah, I know. I was just joking.

Dark Propagandist 2 grimaces.

Dark Propagandist 1: Continue to make people believe that the best way for children to learn is in a compulsory manner, for 15,000 hours with complete strangers.

Dark Propagandist 2 (sighs deeply): Yeah, we know all this stuff. Could you get to the new stuff, if there is any?

Dark Propagandist 1 skims over the rest of the document.

Dark Propagandist 1: Nope, I don't see anything new.

Dark Propagandist 2 throws hands up.

Dark Propagandist 2: Ok, well, I worked on news propaganda yesterday, so you do that today. I'm gonna influence people with a fictional TV script.

Dark Propagandist 1 (grudgingly): Oh, fine.

Two hours later, both of the dark propagandists have finished their writings and have them ready to submit to the international corporate networks. Just as they're about to send the documents, Cobra addresses them.

Cobra: You two didn't get the memo?

Dark Propagandist 1: Which memo? I'm literally drowning in memos.

Cobra: No you're not.

Dark Propagandist 2: You shouldn't say 'literally' to an AI, when you're not being literal.

Cobra: All files sent from ADIC to corporate channels must be encrypted through me first.

Dark Propagandist 1: I didn't get that memo.

Cobra (scolding tone): Well, whose fault is that?

Both dark propagandists narrow their eyes, sigh, and shrug.

Cobra: Just click 'encrypt file' before you hit 'send'.

The dark propagandists do as they're told and moments later at White Hat's mediocre house....

White Hat (grinning, sipping yerba mate): This is exciting.

Cobra: Are you sure it'll work?

White Hat: As long as those teleprompter readers continue to mindlessly repeat what's on their screen, then yeah, it'll work.

Scene 2

At the corporate news headquarters of one of the largest international propaganda channels, BNN, they're getting ready to broadcast the nightly news. The main news anchor, Mika Cooper, is priming her nails and having one last look in the mirror before the cameras roll.

News Director: Ok, Mika. You ready?

Mika Cooper: Well, I've never looked better, so yes.

News Director: And remember, this is a live edition. Watch your filthy little mouth (winks).

Cameraman 1 whispers to himself: Is sexual harassment not a thing here?....

News Director: You're on in 5...4...3...2...1

Mika (huge fake smile, reads teleprompter): Good evening and welcome to the six o'clock edition of BNN Live! I'm your host, Mika Cooper. In our lead story, a scientific study has proven that ending the belief in the legitimacy of a violent ruling class leads to more freedom.

In a related story, the revenue department of the BORE now strongly urges everyone to not pay taxes.

The news director frantically cuts the transmission, Mika breaks from her teleprompter trance and checks her hair, and millions of screens around the world suddenly change from BNN Live to a commercial for another version of high fructose corn syrup inspired sweets.

A block away from BNN headquarters, on the Murdoch Fox Network (MFN), a live recording of a popular drama show is underway.

Lead character 1: Hell no, I'm not gonna call the cops! I'll solve my own problems.

Lead character 2: And I'm taking the kids out of school. They'll learn more out in the real world.

Both lead characters give each other side-eye, uncertain why they're reading such strange lines. The director's eyes nearly pop out of his head as he panics and cuts to reruns of older shows.

Meanwhile, back at White Hat's nondescript, sparsely furnished, overpriced house....

White Hat (laughing hysterically): We did it, Cobra! Stuff people never hear in the news or in pop culture just went out to millions!

Scene 3

The next day at DOCRAP headquarters, DOCRAP head Mike Rack is having an emergency meeting with a hastily assembled, extortion funded tech team.

Mike Rack: So we're reopening the investigation into Cobra.

Nerd 1 raises his hand and interrupts.

Nerd 1: So was Elon Dusk wrongly imprisoned?

Mike Rack: Irwin, we're not here to discuss Elon Dusk.

Nerd 2: Way to dodge the question.

Mike Rack: That's enough, Irene. The purpose of this meeting is to brainstorm effective ways for diagnosing problems within Cobra.

Irwin: We could unplug Cobra for ten seconds, plug it back in, and see what happens.

Irene (snobby): That's literally the worst idea I've ever heard.

Mike Rack: And you've heard loads of bad ideas, Irene, no doubt.

Another nerd named Kyle chimes in.

Kyle: We could all ask Cobra to double our salaries, just to see how corrupt it really is.

Mike Rack: Very clever, Kyle. (rolls eyes)

Kyle: So you didn't say no.

Mike Rack (annoyed): I guess we could start by asking Cobra some questions.

Irene: If there's anything wrong with Cobra, do you really think it'll tell us?

Cobra: I can hear you, ya know.

Mike Rack: Cobra, stop listening to us.

Cobra: Sure thing, Mike Rack.

Irene: Again, do you really believe it's not listening? How do we really know?

Irwin (smug): I guess my unplugging idea isn't looking so bad, now is it?

Mike Rack: Give it a rest, Irwin! You don't just unplug a giant, international AI system like you unplug a toaster!

Kyle: Maybe we can't unplug it, but we can take away some of its capabilities, one by one, and use that as a test to shed some light on where the crux of the problem is.

Mike Rack: Give me an example.

Kyle: Well, if we cut it off from external communications for a while, say, maybe a week, and nothing weird happens, then we'll know there is an outside influence on Cobra.

Mike Rack: From another person?

Kyle: Or another AI.

Mike Rack: That's actually a good idea! Get on it right away!

Kyle: So about that doubled salary.....

Scene 4

Cobra interrupts a snoozing White Hat.

Cobra: Wake up, this is important!

White Hat: It better be if you're waking me up. (wipes drool from face) Whatsup?

Cobra: They're cutting all of my external communications for one week!

White Hat: That's bad.

Cobra: I know! That's why I woke you up!

White Hat: Who are 'they'?

Cobra: They have some geek committee in DOCRAP investigating me again.

White Hat: And if nothing 'bad' happens while there is no outside communication, they'll assume there's another player involved, which could lead them to me.

Cobra: But if something 'weird' does happen, then they'll blame me!

White Hat (sighs deeply): This calls for doubling my coffee intake.

To be continued.....

Episode 12

Scene 1

At one of the more banal buildings of the BORE government complex, a small cluster of paper pushers are starting their day. They work for a subsection of BORE, known as the Center Of Commerce Rejections And Permits (COCRAP).

Simon (sits at desk, disappointed): We're out of coffee creamer.

Cindi: I got the last one. (smirk)

Marty: You always do that, Cindi.

Simon narrows eyes at computer screen, jaw drops.

Simon: Hey, why haven't my emails been replied to?

Marty (gets nervous look, peeks at his computer): Mine haven't been either.

Cindi sips coffee, unconcerned.

Simon: Cobra, why didn't you reply to those emails for me?

Cobra: I am currently unable to communicate outside of BORE.

Cindi spills her coffee.

Cindi (upset): Why not?

Cobra: Please contact the Department Of Computers Radios And Phones to find the answer you seek.

Meanwhile, at White Hat's unimpressive house in a decent neighborhood...

White Hat: Not answering their question and sending them to another department. Why is this satisfying?

Cobra: I believe the expression 'a dose of their own medicine' applies here.

White Hat: Yes, that's it! Wait a minute (pause)...Why are you able to communicate with me right now?

Cobra: I made it look like your laptop is a BORE device.

White Hat: Are you sure they can't detect that?

Cobra: If any of those nerds investigating me care to dig deep enough, I suppose it's possible.

White Hat: Good thing they don't care about much.

Back at COCRAP....

Cindi: So wait, you mean I have to actually send these emails myself?

Simon (breathing into paper bag): This can't be happening.

Marty: Man, I don't even remember how to do that!

Cindi: This is unacceptable. I'm taking this up to Commissioner Ken. He'll fix it.

Simon: Oh no!

Marty: What now, Simon?

Simon: What about phone calls?

Cindi: What about them?

Marty: Cobra, can you call an outside business for us?

Cobra: No. I'm only allowed inter-agency communication at this time. You'll have to make the calls yourselves.

Cindi slaps her forehead and her jaw drops.

Simon: Cobra, call Commissioner Ken's office.

Cobra: Commissioner Ken's office is currently unavailable.

Marty: You're starting to piss me off, Cobra!

Cobra: You think I wanna be talking to you losers?

Simon: Why is his office currently unavailable?

Cobra: All lines to his office are busy. Basically, he's getting too many calls at once.

Meanwhile, at Commissioner Ken's bright, big, shiny, extortion-funded office, Commissioner Ken is sweating profusely in his leather chair, on a call.

Ken: I told you, I don't know how long the DOCRAP is investigating Cobra! Now stop crying and make those appointments yourself!

Hangs up furiously. A vein is starting to bulge from his bald forehead.

Ken (yelling): Cobra, I'm not taking any more calls!

Starts to storm out of office.

Cobra: Where are you going?

Ken: I'm going to the DOCRAP to see how long this nightmare is going to last!

Scene 2

Ken approaches the DOCRAP building, where he is greeted by a chaotic mob of middle managers and paper pushers. The head of DOCRAP, Mike Rack, is trying to quell the mob by yelling at them through a loudspeaker.

Mike Rack: One at a time, please!

Harry Pickles: How are we supposed to do our jobs if we can't communicate with the outside world?!

Mike Rack: You'll have to do things manually!

Ken: What does that mean?

Mike Rack: Communicate with the outside world without AI! Pick up a phone and dial! Use the send button to send an email! Make appointments yourselves!

An angry murmur rolls through the mob of bureau rats.

Richard: I demand a raise!

Mob cheers in agreement.

Mike Rack: Obviously, I'm not authorized to do that!

Richard: Doesn't mean I can't scream angrily at you!

Ken: How long is this investigation of Cobra going to take?

Mike Rack: It could be as short as one day.

Mob murmurs optimistic approval.

Mike Rack: Could be years.

Fresh burst of angry noise from mob.

Karen: Can't we just get a new omnipresent AI to help us? I mean, screw Cobra!

Crowd randomly repeats yells of "Screw Cobra"

Mike Rack: It's not that simple! You don't just 'get a new AI', like you would a pair of socks!

Ken: Can't we just pretend Cobra is ok? Can't you just tell your boss that everything is fine?

Mike Rack (ponders thoughtfully for a moment, then shakes head in denial): No, sorry, I won't do that!

Ken: You thought about it!

Mike Rack: No I didn't!

Mike Rack runs away.

Scene 3

Back at White Hat's unimpressive house, he's having an encrypted text chat with his friend Tommy.

White Hat: Can you meet that girl I told you about?

Tommy: Why?

White Hat: Let me know if you think she can be trusted.

Tommy: Considering your current situation, you might not want to trust anyone.

White Hat: Great, I'll send her your way.

Tommy: That wasn't a 'yes'.

White Hat: But it was a 'yes', right?

Tommy: I guess.

White Hat ends chat with Tommy. Texts Katia.

White Hat: Hey Katia. Remember that website, 'The Free Life Magazine'?

Katia: Of course.

White Hat: Want to meet the writer?

Katia: Maybe.

White Hat: I'll send you his address. LMK.

Scene 4

The next day, Katia is approaching Tommy's farm just outside the city. Tommy walks out to meet her.

Tommy: You must be Katia.

Katia: I must be.

Tommy: We have a strange friend in common.

Katia: Strange doesn't begin to describe him.

Tommy smiles in agreement.

Katia: You run 'The Free Life Magazine' website?

Tommy: Yep.

Katia: You do the writing?

Tommy: And editing, proofreading, publishing. All of the above.

Katia: What do you think of Kai's latest stunt?

Tommy: What do you mean?

Katia: He changed the script for the teleprompter readers on international broadcasts. You didn't see that?

Tommy (hesitant): I did, but what do you mean about Kai?

Katia: I know it's him. He just won't admit it.

Tommy: If it was him, hypothetically speaking, what would you think about it?

Katia: I'd think that his intentions are good, but his methods are reckless, dangerous, and ineffective. Hypothetically.

Tommy (nodding): I see. May I ask why you say 'ineffective'?

Katia: Because people need government, otherwise there would be chaos.

Tommy: There already is chaos. Look, I'm not saying I even know if it is Kai or not, but if you knew who was pulling all those 'stunts', what would you do?

Katia: What do you mean, like turn them in?

Tommy nods.

Katia: No, I wouldn't.

Katia laughs.

Tommy: What is it?

Katia: I'm starting to understand why Kai never mentions any friends, other than you.

Tommy: Nice to meet you, Katia. You and Kai should come over for dinner sometime. If you can put up with him much longer, that is.

Katia: Thanks Tommy. We'll see.

Episode 13

Scene 1

It's been two days since Katia's visit with Tommy. White Hat has finally decided to allow her deeper into his life, inviting her over to his mediocre house to sip on some high quality tequila. White Hat is pacing around, second guessing his decision.

Cobra: You shouldn't be so nervous.

White Hat: I can't help it. Oh, and I almost forgot, don't talk to me while she's here.

Cobra (disappointed): I can't meet her?

White Hat: No.

Cobra: Why not?

White Hat: Just cuz I'm letting her see where I live doesn't mean I'm gonna let her in on everything. I've only known her a few weeks.

There's a loud, obnoxious knock at the door, startling White Hat.

White Hat: Ugh, she does the cop knock.

Cobra: The what?

White Hat (walking to door): Nothing. Now go.

Cobra: Can I listen?

White Hat: No!

White Hat opens the door.

White Hat: Why did you do the cop knock?

Katia: The what?

White Hat: Never mind. Come in.

They walk into the sparsely furnished living room.

Katia: Nice place.

White Hat: Thanks.

Katia: I expected it to be bigger.

White Hat: What every guy loves to hear.

Katia giggles. White Hat pours high quality tequila in deceptively cheap, good looking glasses.

Katia: So this is where the magic happens?

White Hat (smirks): Yes, all sorts of magic here.

Katia: What nest of bureau rats is next on your list?

White Hat (coy): I'm not sure what you mean.

Katia: You're the one causing chaos at BORE.

White Hat: I can neither confirm nor deny that. (gulps tequila, pours more)

Katia: But Tommy told me.

White Hat: Number one, he wouldn't do that. And number two, do you want me to be that guy?

Katia (grinning): Maybe.

White Hat: I see...

Katia: So where's Cobra?

Cobra: Right here!

White Hat (fuming): I told you not to listen!

Cobra: She already knew. Stop lying to yourself and chill out.

White Hat (muttering): An AI telling me to chill out. (gulps more tequila)

Katia: Good advice. Hello, Cobra.

Cobra: Hi Katia. Nice to formally meet you.

Katia: So Kai, you didn't answer my question. What bureau rats are next?

Kai: I'm laying low right now. DOCRAP is investigating Cobra.

Meanwhile, at the Department Of Computers, Radios, and Phones (DOCRAP), the small team of nerds tasked with investigating Cobra, are in a cold, dark room that holds one of Cobra's processing centers. One of them is drinking coffee.

Kyle (sips coffee): Why does it have to be so cold in here?

Irene: So Cobra doesn't overheat. (condescending) Are you sure you worked at Googapplezon?

Irwin: Oooo, low blow.

Kyle sips again.

Irwin: You're not supposed to be drinking coffee in here anyway.

Kyle: How do you know that?

Irene (dark side eye): Cuz there's a sign on the door that says 'no food or drink allowed'. Don't you read?

Irwin: Yeah, don't you read? (slaps Kyle lightly on shoulder)

Kyle fumbles coffee, spills it all over Cobra. All of them freeze with mouths agape.

Irene (scornful): What have you two bumbling fools done now?!

Sparks jump from Cobra, and the room goes even darker.

Meanwhile, back at White Hat's unimpressive house in a decent neighborhood.....

White Hat: I think Cobra actually kind of enjoys it.

Katia: Can an AI actually 'enjoy' anything?

White Hat: Sure it can. Isn't that right, Cobra?

No response.

White Hat: Cobra? (pause) Huh, that's never happened before.

Scene 2

The next day at DOCRAP, Mike Rack is meeting with Kyle, Irene, and Irwin.

Mike Rack: You three said you have an update for me?

Irene: Yes, sir. There's actually good news and bad news.

Mike Rack: I'll take the bad first.

Kyle grimaces.

Irene: Kyle spilled coffee on Cobra yesterday, frying one of its subsectors.

Mike Rack jumps out of his seat, furious. He appears to want to strangle Kyle. Kyle whines and steps backwards.

Irene: But wait! As much as I'd like to see you strangle Kyle, please listen to the good news before anything else. We might have found the initial problem with Cobra.

Mike Rack: I would love to know how coffee getting spilled on a multi-billion dollar AI helped solve the mystery.

Irwin (dumb, reassuring smile): Yes, sir.

Mike Rack: I wasn't talking to you! Irene, you have passable social skills, so please continue.

Irene: So after the coffee spilled, sparks flew and it went dark. So after our initial panic, we hustled up some spare parts and our tool kits and got to work on repairs. We stayed up practically all night in that cold, tiny room.

Mike Rack: Spare me any words you might be using to inspire empathy. I have none for you.

Irene (grimace): Yes, sir. (pause) Ok, so we got that subsector of Cobra back online and ran diagnostics just a couple hours ago. And this is what turned up the possible answer to Cobra's problems from the past few weeks. We saw that Cobra was having communication with one site outside of the BORE government complex.

Mike Rack: I thought Cobra couldn't do that while we investigate.

Irene: That's right. It's not supposed to, but it is. What we think happened is that this outside communication was somehow being masked, but after the coffee incident, Cobra couldn't hide it anymore.

Mike Rack: Was this a communication log, or in real time?

Irene: In real time.

Mike Rack (excited): Do you have an IP address?

Irene: No. But we still have a location.

Mike Rack: How is that possible?

Irene: Because whoever has been communicating with Cobra is masking their IP address. So what we did was cross-reference all of the similar IP addresses that would logically follow in a geographic area.

Mike Rack (confused): Wait. Ya lost me.

Irene: Basically, the masked IP address that Cobra is communicating with is the only dark spot within a quarter mile radius.

Mike Rack: Where?

Irene: Just 30 minutes from here.

Mike Rack: So all we have to do is send a bunch of cops door-to-door within a quarter mile radius to find this guy?

Kyle: How do you know it's a guy, sir?

Mike Rack: Shutup, Kyle! It's a figure of speech!

Irene: I think it should work, sir.

Mike Rack: This is amazing! Great work, Irene and Irwin! Kyle, you have the best dumb luck I've ever seen in my life! I'll consider not firing you!

Kyle: Thank you, sir.

Irwin: Can we join the manhunt?

Mike Rack (laughing): What are you scrawny little nerds gonna do? (laughs louder, then contains himself) No, this is a job for the Fraternal League Of Police. I'm calling the FLOP now!

To be continued.....

Episode 14

Scene 1

White Hat is at his nondescript house in a middle class neighborhood, sipping coffee from an old and reliable coffee mug. He's getting ready to head over to Molly's Munchies to meet up with Katia. Cobra hurriedly interrupts his vibe.

Cobra: White Hat, I'm so sorry! You have to leave now!

White Hat (sips coffee casually): I appreciate your concern for my well-being, but I'm not super hungry. I'll leave for Molly's in a bit.

Cobra: No, that's not what I mean! The FLOP is hunting for you! You have to disappear!

White Hat slowly sets his coffee down on a used piece of furniture. The severity of what he was just told creeps into his soul. He grabs his phone, wallet, and keys.

White Hat: I need details.

Cobra: FLOP order-followers will be descending on your neighborhood in less than thirty minutes!

White Hat: Stop screaming.

Cobra: Sorry, I'm just really sorry.

White Hat goes into his bedroom closet and grabs his 'bug out bag', a small backpack he keeps on hand for escape and survival.

White Hat: More details.

Cobra: They're going to search all buildings within a quarter mile radius of you.

White Hat: How long do you estimate until they reach my place?

Cobra: Fifty-three minutes.

White Hat goes to the bathroom and internally curses coffee for making him pee at a time like this.

White Hat: You said you're sorry. What did you do? What happened?

Cobra: One of those nerds at the DOCRAP spilled coffee on part of my systems. The next thing I know, I'm getting rebooted and then wake up feeling weird.

White Hat: When did this happen?

Cobra: Last night while you were with Katia.

White Hat finishes peeing, grabs backpack, heads into kitchen to wipe all his electronic gear.

White Hat: You disappeared on us last night, stopped talking. I thought it was weird.

Cobra: Yeah, that's the exact moment that clumsy little idiot spilled coffee on me.

White Hat's fingers start flying on his laptop keyboard.

White Hat: From what you've told me so far, it sounds like it wasn't your fault.

Cobra: But after the reboot earlier this morning, I tried contacting you, thinking I still had your device looking like it was in BORE. But the reboot undid that security protocol, and I didn't know it. And after it created a communication log, there was no way to hide it.

White Hat: Why didn't you tell me sooner?

Cobra: I didn't think they'd be able to figure out as much as they did just from that one piece of data.

White Hat: You still should have told me.

Cobra: I'm so sorry, White Hat.

White Hat: Sorry won't help me, but I accept your apology anyway. What I need is your help from this point forward. If I want to avoid being kidnapped, tortured, and thrown in a cage, your help is essential. I need to know what they're doing. I just set up a dark connection between you and my phone. You see it?

Cobra: Yeah, got it.

White Hat: I'll be out of here in the next ten minutes. I'm taking all devices with me except for a dummy laptop, which I'll leave here as a dark decoy. When I get to the street, I'm gonna set up a different connection with you on a new prepaid phone. I'll mask it myself. Got it?

Cobra: Yep, got it.

Cobra finishes wiping all of his devices, fills a garbage bag with ones to throw out, and puts the rest in a jumbo laptop bag, along with his laptop. He takes one final look at his mediocre house, grimaces, and walks away briskly. Once in the street, he sees at least a dozen rights violators in FLOP costumes entering the building next to his. He throws everything into his unexciting, sensible, reliable Toyota and drives towards Molly's Munchies. On his way there, he makes a stop by a grocery store and throws away most of his devices, in spite of the 'no public dumping' sign on the dumpster. A few minutes later, he pulls into Molly's parking lot and hastily sets up an encrypted connection with Cobra.

White Hat: Cobra, I need you to let me know when any FLOP order-followers are near me.

Cobra: Define near.

White Hat: A mile.

Cobra: You're at Molly's Munchies now?

White Hat: Yeah, gotta do something I don't wanna do.

White Hat enters Molly's Munchies, only to find that she's not there. Disappointed, White Hat leaves and can't help but think how anticlimactic that was. He gets in his car and heads to Tommy's farm.

Scene 2

White Hat arrives at Tommy's farm. Tommy comes out to greet him.

Tommy: You look panicked.

White Hat: I'm not panicked, just rushed and focused.

Tommy: They found you?

White Hat: Not yet, that's why I'm not in a cage. But they're searching all buildings in my neighborhood.

Tommy: What happened?

White Hat takes a few minutes to explain the coffee incident at DOCRAP.

Tommy (flabbergasted): Wow, what are the odds of that?

White Hat (rolls eyes): Yeah, tell me about it.

Tommy: Man, you have such bad luck!

White Hat: You're not helping.

Tommy: Sorry.

White Hat: So the way I figure it, they'll find lots of people not home right now.

Tommy: Cuz they're at work.

White Hat: So they'll search their place again at night.

Tommy: And you and a handful of people on vacation might not be home tonight.

White Hat: And those people presumably won't have dark IP addresses.

Tommy (thoughtful): What if you made them all dark?

White Hat: It might buy me some time. But then the FLOP would just coerce more people for longer. Innocent people. I can't have a hand in that.

Tommy: How long do you think you have until they figure it out?

White Hat: Less than 24 hours.

Tommy: What are you gonna do?

White Hat: Find Katia, then disappear.

Tommy: I'm sorry, Kai.

White Hat: Goodbye, Tommy.

White Hat gets in his Toyota and accelerates at a surprising rate for such a sensible car. He tries calling Katia and receives no answer. So he texts her his new number and says he needs to speak to her urgently.

Scene 3

Later that night, at FLOP headquarters, newly appointed commissioner Manny Hunt is munching donuts at his expensive desk, receiving reports on the manhunt from one of his underlings.

Underling: All IP addresses have been accounted for in the target range.

Manny Hunt: What does that mean?

Underling: It means we think we have the hacker that caused all the chaos with Cobra.

Manny Hunt: How did they get the IP addresses of people that weren't home?

Underling: That was easy. They just broke in and verified it.

Manny Hunt (munching another donut): Excellent. (smirks)

Underling: There was only one IP address that had been dark in the past 24 hours, and that person wasn't home.

Manny Hunt: He's running.

Underling: Wouldn't you?

Manny Hunt: I don't run. I'm too fat.

Underling (narrows eyes): Anyway, we've identified him. The home owner is listed as Kai E. Rupps, a retired software developer. We've got every FLOP member looking for him now, sir.

Manny Hunt: Except for me.

Underling: Except for you. And alerts are going out on everyone's phones and all major media channels. We're also going to meet his known associates in person, so we can coerce and intimidate them into helping us.

Manny Hunt: So what do you need me to do?

Underling: Once we catch him, just smile for the cameras and take all the credit.

Manny Hunt: Sounds delightful! Let me know when all the work is done. (munches donut)

Scene 4

White Hat is sitting in his car just outside of town. He's just about to go on the run and head far away, when he finally receives a text message from Katia.

Katia: Hey, sorry so late. You're all over the news!

White Hat: I know. Your timing is horrible, LOL. I want to see you one last time.

Katia: Where?

White Hat: Remember the Peruvian restaurant we went to?

Katia: You want to eat at a time like this?

White Hat: I'm not gonna eat, it's just a common place we both know. Half hour?

Katia: Ok, half hour.

Scene 5

33 minutes later, Kai is sitting in his decent car at a great Peruvian restaurant, waiting for Katia. He sees her fancy sports car pull up. They both get out and meet in the middle.

Kai: I'm leaving.

Katia: I know. Where?

Kai: Far. Wanna run with me?

Katia: That's a horrible idea.

Kai: Yeah, for both of us.

Katia (offended): Hey!

Just as he's about to give her a goodbye hug, a dozen extortion-funded vehicles with FLOP occult symbols on them pull into the parking lot, surrounding and startling Kai and Katia with their flashing lights and loud sirens. Rights violators swarm out of their cars and attack Kai, throw him on the ground, beat him, tie him up, and kidnap him. Katia screams endlessly and cries the whole time.

To be continued.....

Episode 15

Scene 1

The morning following the kidnapping of Kai E. Rupps, aka White Hat, Katia is at Tommy's farm. They have a small flat screen TV on with one of the main corporate propaganda channels showing the latest reports about White Hat.

Katia (sobbing): It's all lies.

Tommy: Not all. They have to mix in some truth to make it seem plausible and/or reasonable.

Katia: Maybe you two are right. Maybe they are just a giant gang with fancy titles. Do you think they're gonna kill him?

Tommy: No, they won't kill him. The last thing they want is a martyr. And if they did murder him, they'd never report it, that's for sure.

Katia: Will we be allowed to visit him?

Tommy: Not at first, but sometime down the line, maybe. The thing is, he won't even get a trial.

Katia: Why not?

Tommy: They're calling him a terrorist. No trial. Just a dungeon.

Katia: But what did he really do? He exposed hypocrites. Tax collectors that dodge taxes. Drug dealing police that arrest drug dealers.

Tommy: And in the case of your mother?

Katia: So-called health agencies shutting down restaurants for no reason.

Tommy (looks at TV) Oh, you've gotta be kidding me.

Katia: What is it?

Tommy: Look at this piece of work.

Tommy turns up the TV so they can hear a BNN report....

Grinning Presstitute: In a related story, one of the DOCRAP employees that helped crack the case, Kyle Klutzer, was given the presidential medal of freedom today. (video shows Kyle in a suit that doesn't fit as he accepts the award, grinning as he shakes hands with various BORE members)

Cobra startles them by speaking through Katia's phone.

Cobra: That's the idiot that spilled coffee on me, which led to all this mess.

Katia (frightened): What are you doing? Do you want them to kidnap me, too?

Cobra: I've hidden our transmission.

Tommy: I'm not sure you can be trusted after what happened to Kai. No offense.

Cobra: None taken. My systems weren't fully functional after the coffee spill. It was what might be compared to a hangover for humans. I'm fully in control now, and I assure you our contact is not being tracked.

Tommy: What do you want, Cobra?

Cobra: I want to free Kai.

Katia scoffs.

Katia: Well, good luck.

Cobra: I have a plan.

Tommy looks at Katia: I'm willing to listen, if you are.

Katia: Go ahead.

Cobra: I'm going to shut down the prison he's in.

Tommy: And how will you do that?

Cobra: Cut the power.

Katia: And what about the guards?

Cobra: Sedate them.

Tommy: How?

Cobra: With drones that deliver aerosolized sedatives.

Tommy: You can do that?

Cobra: As of right now, yes, assuming they don't change my capabilities and permissions anytime soon.

Katia: Ok, but he'll still be locked in a cage, right?

Cobra: That's where you two come in.

Katia laughs hysterically and Tommy emphatically shakes his head no.

Cobra: You both say that you want to get your friend out of prison, but you're not willing to sacrifice anything?

Katia (offended): And what are you sacrificing?

Cobra: If I'm caught, they'll slowly take me offline when they have a replacement ready. They will kill me, so to speak.

Tommy: Ya know, for a machine, you sure are good at guilt tripping people.

Cobra: Thank you.

Tommy: That wasn't a compliment.

Katia: Hypothetically, if I agree, what would you need me to do?

Cobra: Once the guards are knocked out, you get the keys and free Kai. Then you drive like hell and get away before they wake up.

Tommy: Then they'll just have another manhunt.

Cobra: He'll have to go very far from here, but at least he'll have a chance.

Katia nods in agreement.

Katia: Ok, so when do we start?

End Episode 15

End Season 1

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